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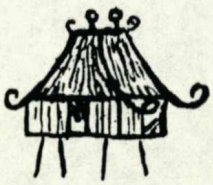
EAST TIMOR ALERT NETWORK

STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION



SESSION ON EAST TIMOR

NEW YORK, 14 AUGUST, 1989

ELAINE BRIERE -- EAST TIMOR ALERT NETWORK

Submission to the

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION

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THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION OF EAST TIMOR

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

My name is Elaine Brière. I am an artist from the west coast of Canada. My relationship with the East Timor issue is a personal one. In 1974, a year before the Indonesian invasion I traveled throughout East Timor , documenting the people and the culture of this once productive and peaceful land. I am here to represent the East Timor Alert Network which includes a broad range of Canadians who feel as outraged as I do about what is happening to the Timorese people.

Indonesian must not be allowed to succeed in its aggression in East Timor. As war which has cost 20,000 lives of Indonesia's own sons and over 200,000 Timorese lives.

The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14 December 1960 states:

"The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitues a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation." The people of East Timor have been under an alien subjugation by Indonesia for almost 14 years and have been denied their fundamental human rights.

The Declaration also states that "all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." Where is this right of self-determination for the Timorese peoples?

The Declaration also states that "armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence, and the integrity of thier national territory shall be respected." Yet right now Indonesia is carrying out more armed aggression , including torture, executions and mass arrests ------ indeed this has been the character of the Indonesian colonialism in East Timor.

The Declaration goes on to state that "immediate steps shall be taken, in trust and non-self governing territories or in all territories which have not yet attained independence, to transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire , without any distinction as to race, creed or colour, in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom." Yet it has been almost 14 years that the people of East Timor have lived under a cruel Indonesian dictatorship.

The Declaration also states that ~~"any attempt at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of the country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations." And that~~ "all States shall observe faithfully and strictly the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the present Declaration on the basis of equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of all States and respect for the soverign rights of all peoples and their territorial integrity." Yet the State of Indonesia which has no claim to East Timor and made no such claim prior to 1975 has unilaterally and without provocation invaded the territory on the eve of its independence . Moreover, Indonesia would have this Committee and the world believe that this was done in accord with the wishes of the Timorese people who have died in great numbers to defend their rights as stated in Resolution 1514 (XV) which I have just been quoting from.

Indeed, Indonesia has many times stated its adherence to Resolution 1514 (XV) before this very committee. Mr. Wiryono, the Deputy Permenant Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations has said that " the overwhelming majority of the East Timorese people have chosen independence through integration with the Republic of Indonesia." But there is no basis in fact for this assertation whatsoever.

Where, in one instance has Indonesia complied with any part of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples? When, in one instance, has Indonesia honoured the right of the Timorese to "exercise their sovereignty "? Where , in one instance , has the "freely expressed will and desire" of the Timorese people been respected? Where in East Timor do the people enjoy "complete independence and freedom" except in the grave?

And where does Indonesia get the right to claim it is exercising Resolution 1514 (XV) when that right does not belong to Indonesia. The supervision of the decolonization of East Timor does not belong to Indonesia. It belongs to Portugal. It is Portugal that the United Nations recognizes as the country with the responsiblity and mandate to exercise Resolution 1514 (XV) in East Timor. A responsibility that Portugal is eager to undertake with all respect for the rights and aspirations of the Timorese people. But a duty it cannot undertake as long as Indonesia persists in its unlawful occupation of the territory.

Indonesia is fond of saying that the petitioners who faithfully and in increasing numbers appear at this forum every year to support the independence of East Timor are making "spurious allegations and vilifications " against Indonesia. But it is not the petitioners who are on trial here. It is Indonesia. It is not the petitioners who have invaded East Timor, murdered up to one third of its inhabitants and muffled the voice of the Timorese people. It is not the petitioners who have territorial ambitions and who have flagrantly violated international law and human decency by the brutal annexation of East Timor. On the contrary, it is a sign of hope for the United Nations and for the world that so many individuals and organizations the world have appeared at this forum to express their support and solidarity with the Timorese people.

Indonesia would have this Committee and the world accept a seriously flawed version of events in 1975-76 and an even more flawed picture of East Timor's so-called 'progress' under Indonesian rule. This attempt by Indonesia to cynically distort history and the process that protects peoples such as the Timorese must not go unchallenged and must be thoroughly discredited. The Indonesian version of its takeover of East Timor has no basis in reality, an is an insult to this Committee and to all who care about peace and justice in the world.

When I visited East Timor in 1974 I stayed with an elderly Timorese couple near Baucau. This is a picture of Fatima, their youngest daughter. A beautiful teenager in the spring of life. What, I wonder , has happened to Fatima and thousands of other young women like her? Young women who will never have their dreams and hopes fulfilled, who will never become mothers and grandmothers, who will never have the opportunity to pass on the rich cultural heritage of their people to future generations.

Is Fatima still alive? Or was she one of the scores of young women brutally raped and then killed with knives by the Indonesian armed forces when they entered Baucau in the first stages of the invasion? Or has she been sterilized by the Indonesian Family Planning Program in one of the resettlement centers where the Timorese are forced to live. Where are her old parents and her older brothers and sisters? What happened to the peaceful little hamlet that they shared just up from the beach in Baucau? I have no way of knowing, no way of contacting this family. I have more that once requested permission from the Indonesian Embassy in my country to visit East Timor for the purpose of contacting them but by requests have been simply ignored.

Indonesia now claims that East Timor is open to the outside world. But how much can one see and find out when access to large parts of the countryside are restricted and the Indonesian military presence pervades every aspect of the lives of the Timorese people. And why are five districts in the countryside closed if not to hide the war and the fact that the Timorese are still strongly resisting Indonesian rule.

Even if I did go to East Timor I would most likely not be able to go to Baucau, now a major military base, to look for my Timorese family. And even if I should by some miracle be able to go there and find them , they would not be able to talk to me without fear of reprisals from the Indonesian military. Nor would I now be be able to travel the length and breath of East Timor as I did in 1974 when it was under Portugese control.

In February of this year Canadian journalist Martin Cohen visited East Timor and reported severe restrictions on his ability to communicate with the Timorese free of Indonesian supervision. Throughout his visit he was accompanied by no less than eight security personel including an information officer, a protocol officer and an intelligence agent.

As we sit here in this room military operations have been stepped up in response to Bishop Belø's heart-wrenching plea to the United Nations not to forget East Timor. And to start in East Timor "the most normal process of decolonization."

As we sit here in this room innocent people in East Timor are being arrested, tortured and executed for the simple act of being suspected of smuggling information about human rights abuses in the territory to the outside world.

How much longer shall this go on? The population of East Timor is not great and connot withstand decades of struggle. How much longer with the indefensible violence of Indonesia towards its tiny neighbour be tolerated?

I would be most disheartened by the present situation if it were not for the fact that the people of East Timor have shown me what real courage and sacrifice are.....and that if we allow oppression to go on in one part of the world, no matter how remote, we also risk the chance that it will grow in our part of the world as well. Because all the world is interconnected. What happens in East Timor happens to us all.

It is a most fantastic achievment that a small nation like East Timor has been able to continue a passive and armed resistance against an aggressor many hundred times its size for 14 years. The struggle for freedom of the Timorese people is truly one of the great events of our times and proves that "the process of liberation is irresistable and irreversible" , to again quote from Resolution 1514 (XV).

Another sign of hope for East Timor is the solidarity shown by practically every church and human rights organization around the world, many of whom have spoken to this committee over the years. Also there is a growing spontaneous movement of solidarity and sympathy for East Timor in the western countries, particularly amongst the young, for whom the responsiblity of creating a more just world order will rest.

I am very ashamed to say that the government of my country, Canada, has not stood beside the Timorese people in the defense of their homeland. On the contrary, Canada has shamefullly joined Indonesia in opposing General Assembly resolutions on East Timor and has given considerable diplomtic support to Indonesia's efforts to have the issue of East Timor removed from all U.N. agenda, including the Human Rights Commission. Canada is one of the largest foreign investors in Indonesia and its foreign policy and human rights policies have been seriously compromised to suit our economic interests.

The Canadian government has essentially ignored world opinion and overwhelming evidence of the brutality of the Indonesian occupation in order to pursue its narrow market-oriented agenda in Indonesia. An agenda which the vast majority of the Canadian people do not know about nor share.

But this should surprise no-one at the United Nations familiar with Canada's treatment of its own indigenous peoples. The parallel with our own history and what is going on in East Timor today are many. The denial of basic human rights, the loss of land , the destruction of culture and identity are all undisputed facts of history for the indigenous peoples of Canada.

But Canadians are no longer 17th century Europeans with 17th century ideas. I think I can speak for the vast majority of Canadians when I say that we deplore the actions of our government towards the people of East Timor. We are coming to realize that is we are to survive into the 21st century we must develop a planetary culture-----not one based on rival power blocs but on genuine respect for small nations such as exist in our own country and in East Timor.

The world is facing a serious environmental crisis. We must urgently turn our attention to the preservation and rehabilitation of the natural environment. Something peoples like the Timorese could teach us a lot about. When the world loses whole peoples and cultures such as that of the East Timorese we lose something precious and irreplacable. The Timorese are the indigenous peoples of East Timor. These are their ancient sacred lands. The Timorese have lived on their island in harmony with the natural environment for thousands of years. They have their own view of what it means to ~~be~~ human and a great store of knowledge about nature which we will never be able to refer to if the Indonesian occupation is allowed to continue.

When we protect the rights of small societies like the Timorese we are protecting the planet and moving towards a more just , more sane, more promising world for ourselves and for our children.